

## Abortion rule possibly being re-evaluated

It looks like the Supreme Court will at least consider the plight of Catholic hospitals and colleges, and other religious institutions around the country which the administration would force to pay for abortion drugs, contraceptives and sterilizations under the "Obamacare" health-insurance reform.

Backers of the Affordable Care Act see this as enforcing women's rights to control their own reproductive systems. Church-run institutions see it as the court ordering them to violate the principles they stand for.

Last week, a Supreme Court justice and at least one Circuit Court of Appeals issued injunctions preventing the government from enforcing the regulations. It could be some time before the court actually hears the case, however, and it's anybody's guess how the full court might rule.

It's also unclear whether a victory by religious nonprofits like hospitals and colleges might help private firms and individual employers like Hobby Lobby and thousands of others whose owners and managers hold similar beliefs.

As the law stands, churches and other religious congregations are exempt from the rule, but church-run institutions such as hospitals, schools and charities are not. Nor are private businesses that happen to be run by believers.

Here's our take on the situation: The backers of this law won a long battle for a dearly-held goal, and now they should be magnanimous to the losers. The government has no business forcing people to violate their religious beliefs anyway.

No one has to work at a church-sponsored hospital or college. Workers knew the policies when they took their jobs, and if they really want insurance that covers birth control, they could find a job at a secular institution.

The government has no real purpose in forcing these church-related institutions to comply with this limited part of the new law. Its interest should be served by overall compliance with the law's goals, unless those go beyond providing health-care coverage for all Americans.

In short, this is a fight the government should not be involved in. Liberals may be unhappy that many churches still cling to what some feel are outdated beliefs. But that does not make the beliefs any less sincere, or these groups' First Amendment rights any less real.

If our country still believes in the rights the Founding Fathers staked out for all Americans, then the courts should strike down this move to force everyone to conform to one set of beliefs.

It's not a matter of whether we'll have health-care "reform"; that's already the law. It is a matter of whether we intend to trample the rights of minorities left and right in the name of doing good.

Let's not.

— Steve Haynes



## Is it spring time yet? I'm ready

Don't worry. I can lift it. Just don't tell me if it's heavy.

That's what I said Saturday when we helped a young couple from our church who are renovating a "fixer-upper." They had hauled about 50 trash bags of debris to the curb and we had brought a trailer down for them to use for hauling it to the landfill. The men-folk were talking electrical, wiring and plumbing so I opted to make myself useful and do something that didn't require supervision. Like load the trash bags.

One bag. Two bags. Three bags. Wow, that was a heavy one. Four bags. Five bags. Aren't I done yet? Six bags. Seven. Eight. I need a break. Nine. Ten...fifteen. I'm dyin' here, folks. Twenty, thirty. Oh, Lord. Somebody just shoot me. Forty. Forty-five. Fifty! And done.

After we returned home that night, I made the mistake of sitting down. Ten minutes later when I tried to get up from the recliner, nothing cooperated. My feet were like lead weights, my hands were numb and my back appeared to be permanently bent. I don't remember ever hurting like that.

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



With Winter here, I haven't been physically active like I am in the summer. So all these aches and pains mean I just need to get back to doing more work. Come on April. I'm ready for Spring.

-ob-

When I sat down at my computer to write this column I promised myself I would only take a quick peek at Facebook. But I found the neatest DIY page that someone had posted and two hours later I was still looking at how to make a book shelf out of a pair of crutches and a mini-greenhouse with plastic CD cases.

I've shared with you how I've tried so many new recipes from Facebook friends. Last week I made my own homemade summer sausage, and it was very good. The last few nights I've

been mixing old fashioned oatmeal, yogurt, chia seeds, milk, honey and fruit together and sitting it overnight in the fridge for an easy, cold breakfast treat the next day. Sunday night I made cinnamon rolls with a butter and brown sugar filling. The rolls actually called for fried bacon to be added to the filling, but I didn't think Jim would stand for that. I've read that bacon is being added to almost everything, so one day I will try it.

All this is to say I'm easily distracted. And that's why I'm almost always up past midnight writing this. But, if you know where I can get my hands on an old pair of wooden crutches, let me know.

-ob-

This is sort of cheating because not everyone has access to their own column. But I'm going to abuse my privilege and take this opportunity to send greetings to two of my granddaughters. Taylor turned 15 on Saturday and Alexandria was 19 on Tuesday, so "Happy Birthday" girls. I love you both. Forgive me for not sending a card?

## Continued ag success depends on change

With the advent of the New Year, Kansas farmers and ranchers must once again look to the future with an open mind and the flexibility to develop new ways of marketing their products.

Customers and consumers are driven by changes in personal preferences and increased income levels. "Give consumers what they want" will never ring truer than it will in 2014.

Today's consumers have money and they want to spend it on what they want. Convenience also is very important, and while price is less important, it will still be a major piece of the buying equation.

Our future agricultural economy will continue to be driven by consumer demand. Consumers become wiser, and savvier every day. Tomorrow's well-informed shopper will want, and demand, more information about how and where their food is produced. It will be up to the producer to help provide such information.

Consumers must never be viewed as adversaries. They are the folks who buy agricultural products and keep farmers in the business of producing food, fiber and fuel.

We can never discount consumers' intelligence. Rather, we must seek in-

### Insight

John Schlageck



put from them, and, once we understand what their needs are, provide for them.

Along with giving customers what they want, agricultural producers will once again be called upon to become better risk managers, especially as they continue moving into a market-oriented world arena.

The successful farmer in 2014 and beyond will be the one who manages yield and price risks by knowing exactly what break-even costs of each crop will be. They will incorporate specific goals that ensure profits and include prudent risk-management strategies.

Flexibility will also key future success on the farm and in the market place. One day soon farmers will no longer be able to rely on government disaster relief. Farmers must examine sound, new marketing techniques and the latest crop insurance options com-

ing down the pike.

One attribute many farmers share is common sense. Don't forget to use this vital tool during the upcoming year.

Remember, that past performance never guarantees future success. Avoid greed when marketing. Never wait to sell at the top of the market because you rarely will.

If something sounds too good to be true — it generally is. Always, and this means all the time, explain risk strategies you are considering to your spouse or partner. If they cannot reiterate what you have said and have it make sense, then you may want to reconsider.

While relying on common sense is helpful, it will not always make you a successful farmer. Being thought of as a good farmer will not always ensure profitability either. But, becoming a keener business specialist is a prerequisite to continuing in the profession of farming in the New Year while providing customers what they want.

**John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.**

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